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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 000528

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/11/2017

TAGS: PREL MARR PGOV EZ

SUBJECT: CZECHS WARN THAT RADAR-ONLY MISSILE DEFENSE  
ARRANGEMENT WON'T WIN POLITICAL APPROVAL

Classified By: DCM Cameron Munter for reasons 1.4 b+d

¶1. (C) Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Tomas Pojar warned DCM on May 10 that the recent Congressional move to cut funding for the proposed missile defense (MD) assets in Poland, even though it leaves funding for the Czech radar intact, would undercut the rationale for the system and make it difficult, if not impossible, to win political approval for the radar. Pojar stressed that the concern stems largely from the difficult Czech political situation: with the parliament evenly divided, and MD a divisive topic, the Czech strategy for winning approval of MD is based on certain fundamental principles important to opposition and certain government MPs. At the core these include: the system will protect Europe (including the CR), and it can eventually be integrated with a NATO MD system. Without interceptors in Poland, there is no defense for Europe. The radar in the CR would simply be a forward warning system for protection of the U.S. homeland, losing any clear connection to a future NATO system. In the current political climate, Pojar said, this would not win approval in Parliament.

¶2. (C) Separately, on May 11 we met with Green Deputy Ondrej Liska, a thoughtful critic of the MD proposal, and one who has been focused in particular on the NATO linkage. Without prompting Liska provided the exact same argument. He stressed he intends to make this point directly to Democratic Members of Congress and their staffers.

¶3. (C) Comment: Pojar makes an important point, and Liska underscores it. We encourage Washington agencies to make this clear to interlocutors on the Hill as the DoD appropriations bill moves forward. In Prague, we have explained to our Czech interlocutors that the HASC vote, like the subcommittee vote before it, is not the end of the process, and that the Administration will be working to restore full funding for the third site in the full House and Senate. The better informed observers (like Pojar and Liska) understand the U.S. budget process, but it is wrong to assume that such understanding is widespread. To date, the HASC decision has not had any direct impact on the MD negotiations now underway with the Czechs, nor on the public debate. But so long as there is a question about full (and unconditional) funding for the Polish interceptors, there is a risk that the mood here could shift with supporters of MD (like Pojar) coming under increased attack from skeptics (like Liska), crippling efforts to build support for MD among the Czechs.

End comment

GRABER